



Information Sheet - Working with Animals

Purpose

The purpose of this information sheet is to provide information and guidance to workers and supervisors when working with animals. This information sheet should be read in conjunction with the [Biological Safety Management chapter](#) of the HSW Handbook.

Q1 What are the legislative requirements when working with animals?

Animal work should comply with the [Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes](#); or the [Veterinary Practice Act 2003 \(SA\)](#) and [Regulations 2017 \(SA\)](#).

All work on infected animals should be carried out under the physical containment conditions equivalent to the risk group of the microorganisms present (refer to [AS/NZS 2243.3: 2010 Safety in Laboratories Part 3 Microbiological safety and containment](#)).

Q2 What hazards can I be exposed to when handling animals?

The hazards associated with handling animals can be loosely placed in three major categories:

1. Physical injuries: occurring from manual handling, kicks, bites and scratches. Any injuries should be reported as soon as practicable to your supervisor. Medical advice may be needed if an infected animal inflicted the injury.
2. Zoonotic diseases: diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans. Animal tissues as well as live animals can potentially transmit zoonotic diseases.
3. Allergic reactions: associated with breathing or coming into contact with animal dander or body fluids or other allergens.

Q3 How can I prevent or lower the risks when working with animals?

Physical injuries can be prevented by using appropriate animal handling techniques such as those taught by qualified vets, [Laboratory Animal Services](#) or other proficient or competent individuals. When handling laboratory animals, gloves should be worn, adequate washing facilities should be provided and relevant immunisations is strongly recommended.

Whilst Standard Precautions (see question 6) come from the health profession, they can also help to prevent Zoonotic diseases.

The principles include:

- hygienic practices, particularly washing and drying hands before and after animal contact;
- use of protective barriers when necessary, which may include gloves, gowns, plastic aprons, masks, eye shields or goggles;
- appropriate handling and disposal of sharps and other contaminated or clinical waste; and
- appropriate reprocessing of reusable equipment and instruments.

Allergic reactions can be controlled by reducing skin contact with animal products such as dander, serum and urine. Consider the use of gloves, lab coats, and/or approved particulate respirators with face shields.

General

These include not eating, drinking, or applying cosmetics or contact lenses around animals or animal care areas, wearing gloves when handling animals or their tissues, taking care not to accidentally rub the face with contaminated hands or gloves, and hand washing after each animal contact.

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Q4 What other information should I know when handling animals?

All post mortems on infected animals should be carried out under the physical containment conditions equivalent to the risk group of the microorganisms present. See [AS/NZS 2242.3 2010 Safety in Laboratories Part 3 Microbiological safety and containment](#) Section 6 for details).

During dissections and post-mortem examinations, gloves, aprons (preferably disposable) and safety glasses or goggles should be worn. It may be also necessary to consider respiratory protection.

Penetration of organisms through the skin, especially from accidental self-inoculation and contact with ecto-parasites such as fleas (that live on the outside of a host) are a relatively common source of exposure. Workers can protect themselves against accidental self-inoculation by, substituting manually operated pipettes for needles and syringes, allowing enough time to give injections properly, anaesthetising animals prior to inoculation with infectious agents, and using more than one person to inoculate animals.

In the event that a person becomes ill with a fever or some other sign of infection, it is important that they let their treating doctor know that they work with animals. Report the incident in accordance with the [Report a safety issue or incident Handbook Chapter](#).

Q5 How do I manage the disposal of animal carcasses/tissue, sharps and other waste?

See HSW Handbook Chapter [Biological Safety Management](#) Appendix E Waste Disposal for information on the disposal of animal carcasses/tissue as well as sharps and other relevant waste.

Q6 What are Standard Precautions?

Standard Precautions are the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) adopted term to define appropriate work practices, based on modes of transmission of infectious agents. These precautions are based on the principle that all blood and body substances are potentially infectious. This principle is applied universally to all patients, regardless of their infectious status or perceived risk.

They include:

- hygienic practices, particularly washing and drying hands before and after patient contact;
- use of protective barriers when necessary, which may include gloves, gowns, plastic aprons, masks, eye shields or goggles;
- appropriate handling and disposal of sharps and other contaminated or clinical waste;
- use of aseptic technique ([Refer to the Queensland Health website](#)); and
- use of environmental controls.

Q7 What if I need further information on Working with Animals and Biological Safety Management?

If you require further information, please contact your [local HSW Team](#).

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